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1953

# The Montana **TOURIST SURVEY**

1953

Advertising Office  
Montana Highway Commission

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STATE OF MONTANA  
**HIGHWAY COMMISSION**  
HELENA

December 22, 1953

State of Montana  
Highway Commission  
Helena, Montana

Gentlemen:

Tourism, or the tourist business as it is commonly called, continues to be an important factor of Montana's economy. It has shown a phenomenal increase since the end of the last World War, chalking up gains of varying degrees year after year.

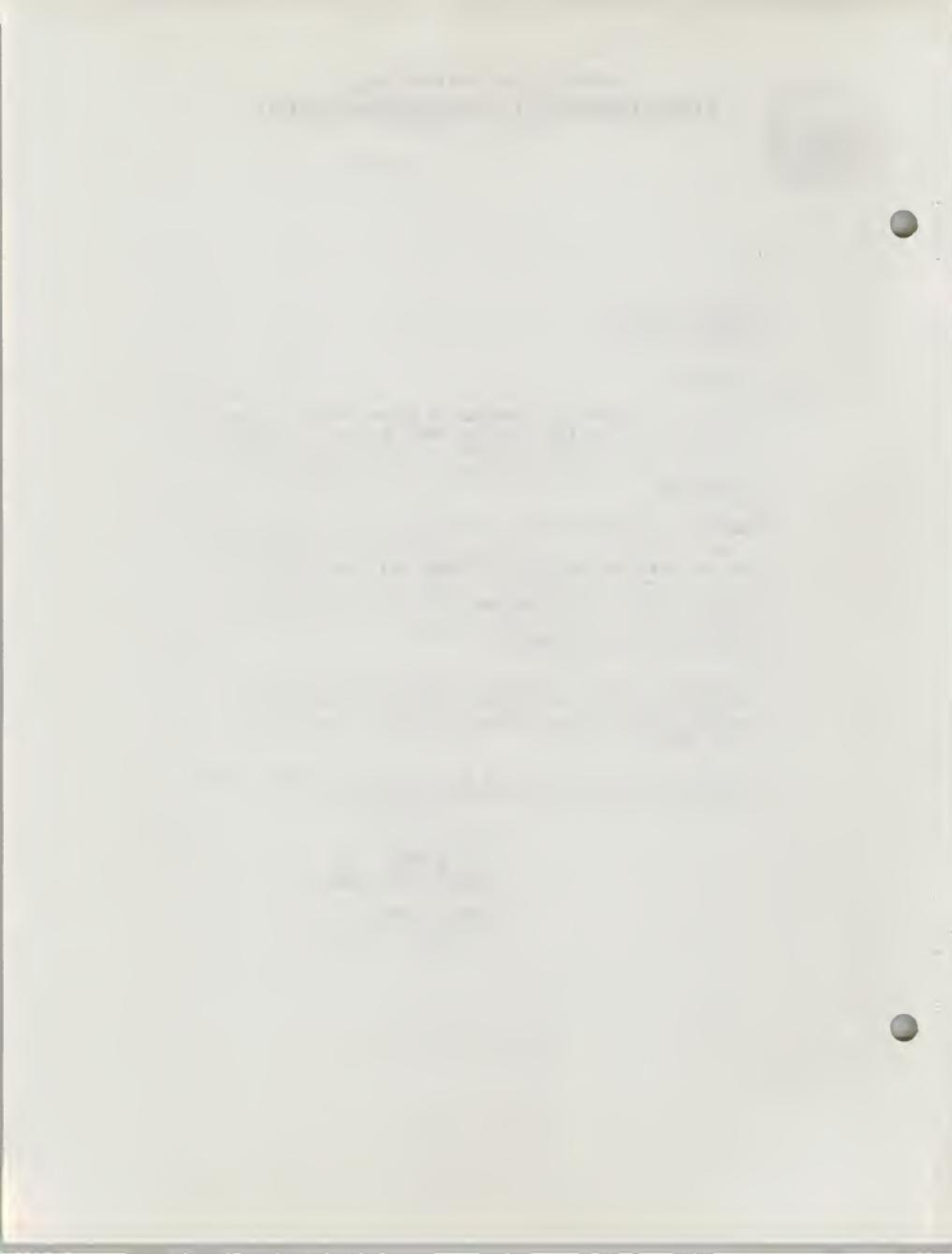
Herewith, the Advertising Office presents its annual Travel Study of Montana's tourist business for 1953. Every effort has been made to keep the statistics reliable, and out of the category of "guesstimates." Authenticity of the study is made possible by operation of the nine port of entry greeter stations where tourist cars are counted and questionnaire cards are distributed.

Although the pace of our tourist traffic has slowed, the state's tourist income increased slightly (1.2%) in 1953. The \$81,282,398 was sufficient to rank it as Montana's third largest industry.

Since the tourist dollar is a new dollar, and a cash dollar, it was most welcome in our Montana communities.

Sincerely yours,

Albert Erickson  
Advertising Director



## TOURIST BUSINESS - 1953

The year of 1953 was another good travel year, although there were signs that the golden postwar bonanza was wearing a bit thin in spots. Recreation and travel continued at a high level. Newsweek magazine estimated that 5% of America's annual income is spent away from home in some sort of travel, whether week ending or on vacations.

Participant sports, such as hunting, fishing and boating, were more popular than ever. A total of 17 million Americans have fishing licenses, 13,900,000 take out hunting licenses. Outboard boating was up 50% in 1953, with 500,000 units sold this year.

Everywhere it was Americans on the go! Not all of them, however, confined their sightseeing to "See America First." More and more the tendency is to broaden out--to see the world. Airlines have inaugurated week end flights to Europe; one week and ten day vacations in Hawaii are popular. Fancy, plush hotels, in the Caribbean and South America, lure more of our neighbors south of the border.

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth boosted British Isles tourist income to a new high, and diverted American travel dollars which might have been spent in seeing Glacier National Park or Custer Battlefield.

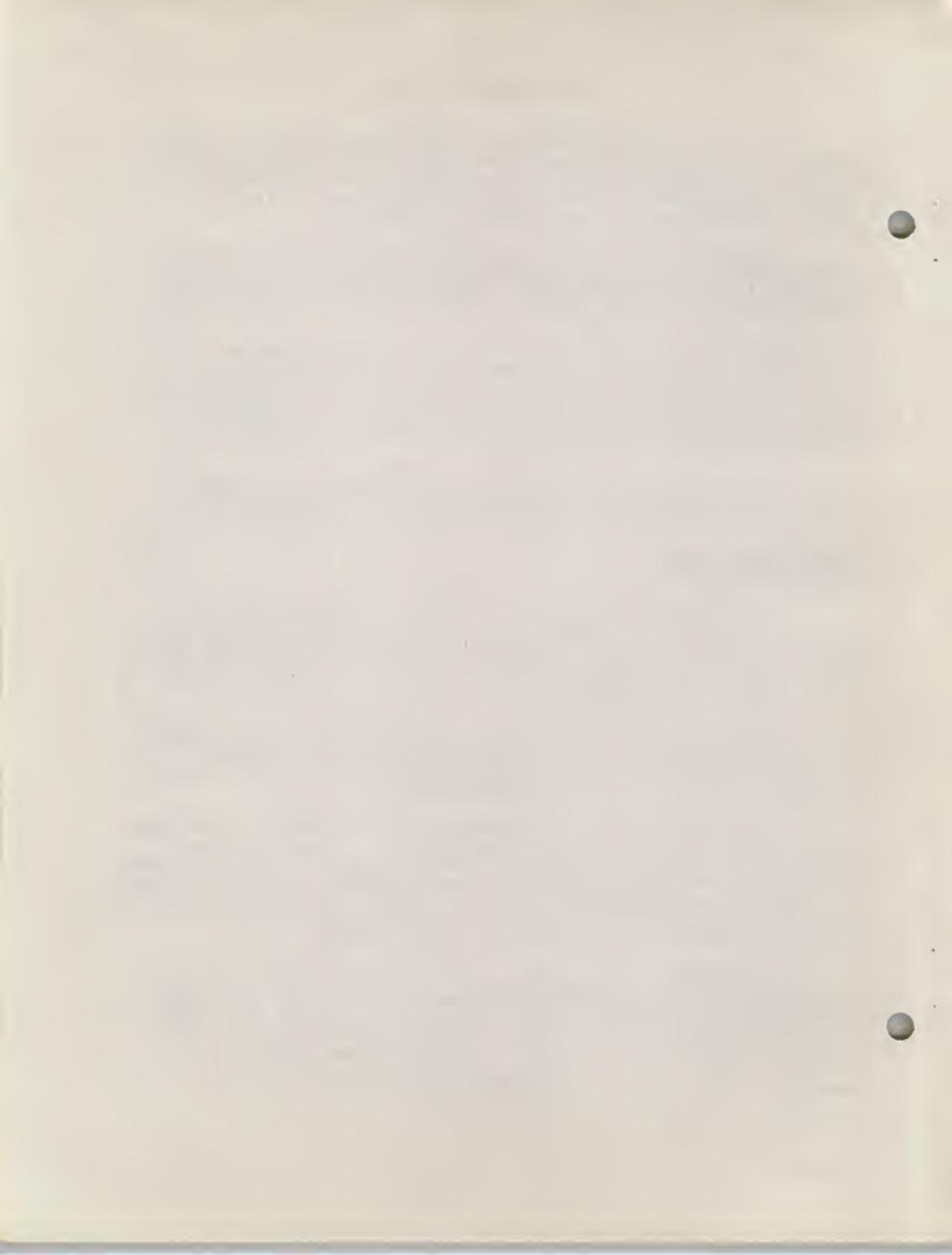
### Travel Experts Report Boom Leveling Off

Holiday magazine should have its finger on the pulse, and here is what its Washington office reports, "The crest of the postwar travel boom appears to have been reached, to the extent that industry may be faced with the necessity of re-examining and expanding its promotion and advertising campaigns in order to sustain the present high level of tourism.

"The new trend, which some travel authorities identify as a definite leveling off of the postwar boom, is attributed to gradual change in the U. S. economy to the point at which the average person does not have as much ready cash as he has had during the past few years."

Another travel authority, American Magazine, confirms "this hard money theory" which seems to have slowed the headlong rush of American domestic travel. The American Magazine's National Travel Index, issued monthly, showed throughout the summer season, that 1953 travel was lagging behind record 1952. Its Index for August tabulating total travel, which includes pleasure travel and business, personal and other travel, stood at 182.5 compared to 231 for August, 1952. July did not show such a great variance.

That travelers are conscious of costs can be seen readily in the rise of trailer travel and the number of campers. In 1953, the Advertising Office printed a campground directory for the state of Montana, listing all campgrounds and picnic spots alongside or near the main federal and state highways in the state. In the course of operation of the port of entry stations, attendants handed out on request 6,000 of these campground directories. They were given only to visitors with trailers, or those desiring to camp out.



## 1953 MONTANA TRAVEL SUMMARY

### Visitors by Automobile:

Number of Tourist cars counted during summer months while port of entry stations were in operation .....	263,741
Number of Out-of-State cars during entire year.....	738,474
Number of Visitors entering by auto during summer .....	870,345
Number of Visitors arriving by out-of-state car during the entire year (computed).....	2,436,966
Average number of passengers per car .....	3.3
Average length of stay .....	4.2 days
Average expenditure per car per stay .....	\$93.57
Average expenditure per person per stay .....	\$28.35
Average expenditure per person per day .....	\$ 6.75

### Visitors Arriving by other means—Train, plane, bus:

Visitors arriving by conveyance other than auto .....	430,138
(Computed on the American Automobile Assn. report that 85% of all tourists travel by car.)	
TOTAL 1953 VISITORS TO MONTANA.....	2,867,104
TOTAL 1953 TOURIST EXPENDITURE.....	\$81,282,398

PLEASE FILL OUT AND DROP IN ANY MAIL BOX

HOME STATE VIRGINIA X

NO. IN PARTY 2

MAIN DESTINATION CALIFORNIA

HOW MANY DAYS DID YOU  
SPEND IN MONTANA?

3

HOW MUCH DID YOUR  
PARTY SPEND IN  
MONTANA?

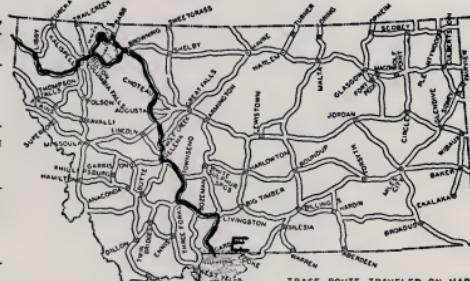
\$60 -

HOUSING IN MONTANA  
(CHECK LODGING USED)

TRAILER NONE

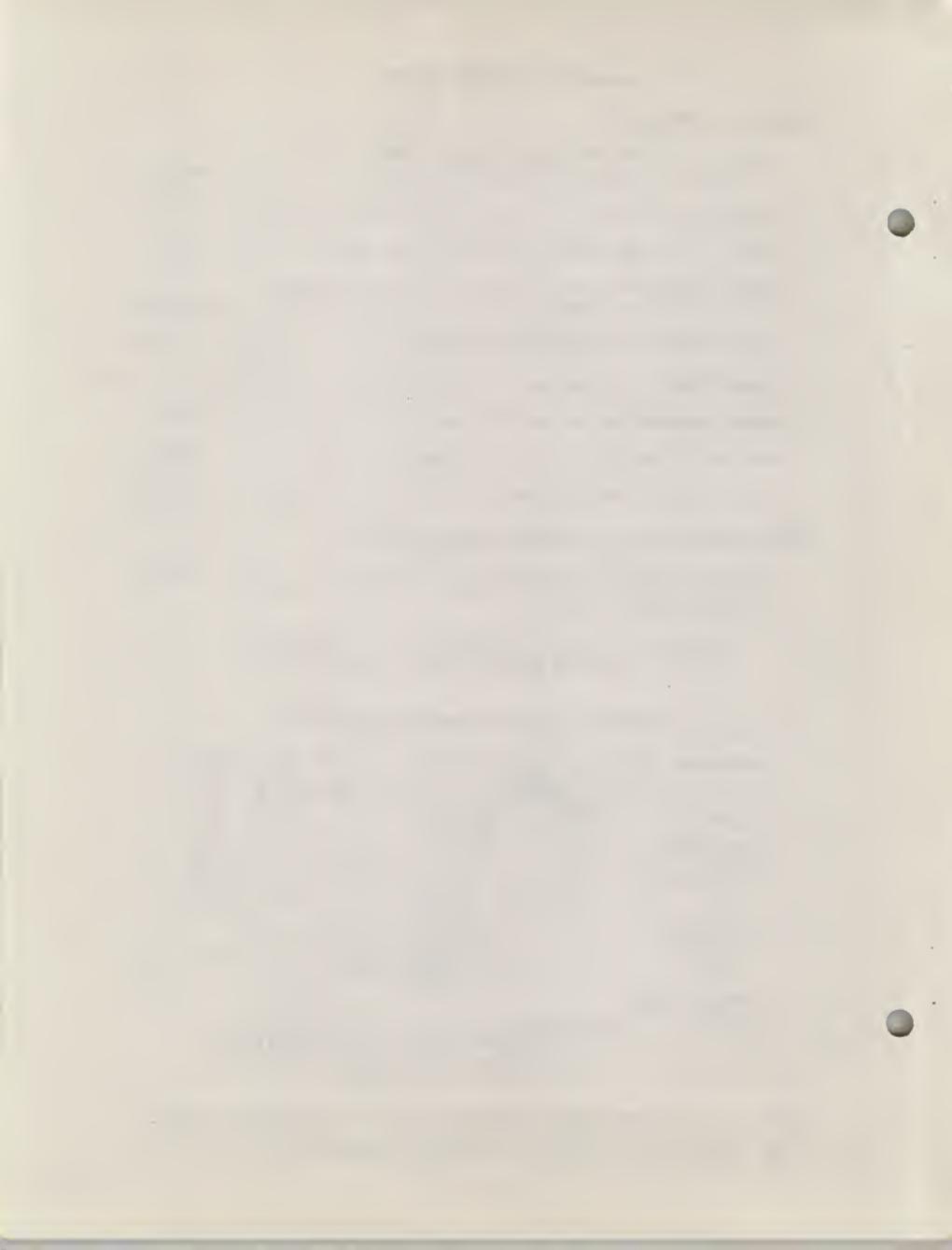
HOTEL MOTEL X

FRIENDS CAMPING



TRACE ROUTE TRAVELED ON MAP  
MARK ENTRANCE E — EXIT X  
GOOD STATE HOSPITALITY.  
MADE THE BEST TIME ON  
YOUR HIGHWAYS TRAVELING  
FROM THE EAST.

10,000 of these questionnaire cards were handed out at ports of entry. Data taken from these cards, plus a year-round projection figure provided by the Planning Survey Dept., form the basis for this Travel Study.



## Montana's Tourist Income In '53 Climbs Slightly

The smallest dollar gain of the postwar period was registered by Montana's tourist industry in 1953 because of a drop in the number of visitors. The \$81,282,398 was the highest on record, but the revenue increase over 1952 was confined to 1.2%. Increases in previous years have run as high as 15%.

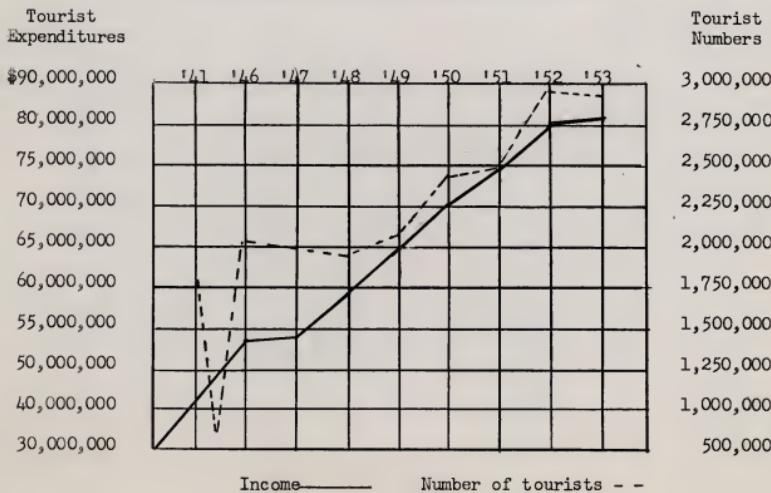
On a per capita basis, Montana's tourist take for 1953 amounted to \$137 for every resident of the state.

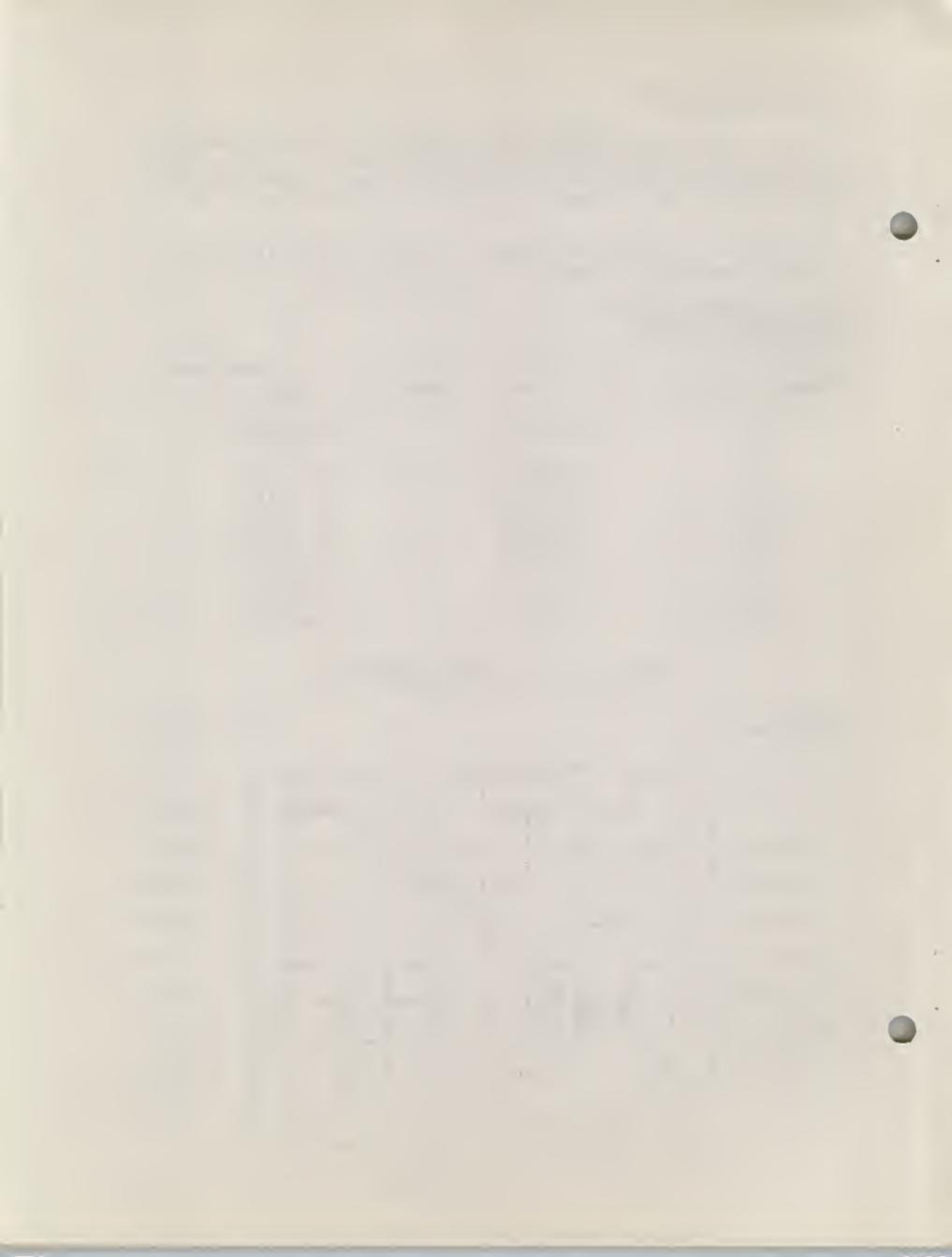
### Postwar Growth of Tourist Business is Phenomenal

This table and the graph below tell the story of the rapid increase shown by Montana's tourist industry during the postwar travel boom.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Tourists</u>	<u>Expenditures</u>
1941	1,774,782	\$ 29,731,721
1946	2,057,399	53,861,971
1947	2,000,000	54,077,600
1948	1,871,430	59,885,760
1949	2,122,028	65,294,901
1950	2,403,353	70,727,327
1951	2,479,714	74,887,362
1952	2,928,962	80,183,263
1953	2,867,104	81,183,324

### ANNUAL TOURIST EXPENDITURES AND NUMBERS





<u>Averages</u>	<u>1948</u>	<u>1949</u>	<u>1950</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1952</u>	<u>1953</u>
Number in party	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.3
Number of Days spent in state	5.0	5.4	5.5	5.2	4.2	4.2
Number of miles driven in state	-	683	728	634	605	-
Amount spent per person per day	\$6.40	\$5.70	\$5.38	\$5.70	\$6.52	\$6.75
Amount spent per person per stay	\$32.00	\$30.77	\$30.91	\$30.20	\$27.38	\$28.35
Amount spent per party per stay	\$99.20	\$95.39	\$98.92	\$96.64	\$89.78	\$93.57

Characteristics of Montana Visitors

From the above table it will be noted that, in recent years, the number of people per car has increased, while the length of stay has decreased. Fortunately, the length of stay remained the same as a year ago.

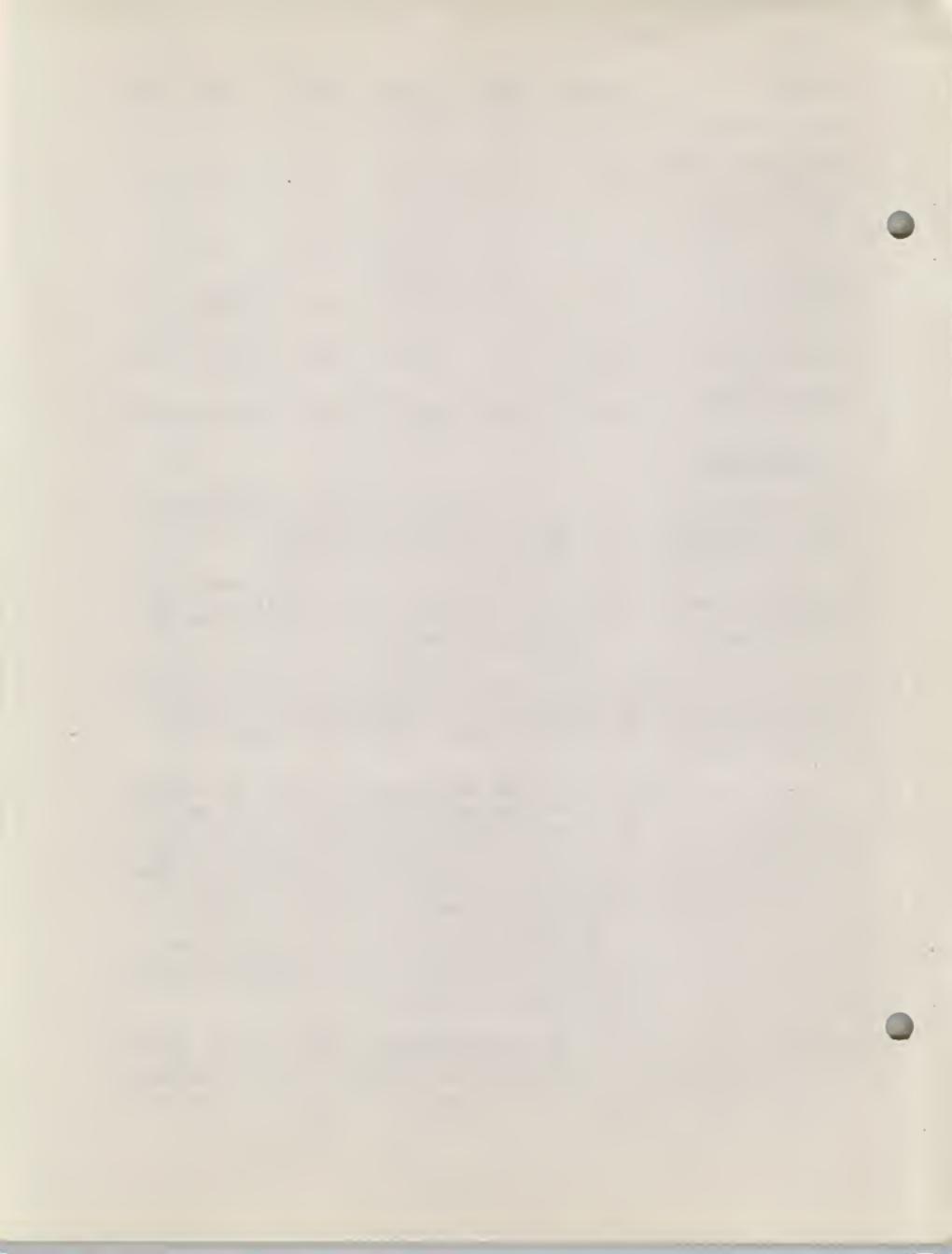
It is difficult to explain why more people are traveling per car unless it is an economy measure. With the costs of travel rising, there is a tendency to economize by "bunching up" in one vehicle. National parks also have reported an increase in the number of people per car.

The 1952 Montana Travel Study pointed out the seriousness of holding our visitors in the state for an additional day. Had our visitors length of stay averaged another day, Montana would have benefitted to the tune of an additional 19 million dollars, or enough to push the tourist income total up to \$100 million.

An ever-present problem is selling Montana as a vacation state. Our length of tourist stay can be increased if our visitors make Montana their main vacation objective, not just a thruway to get some place else. What we need is more one and two week vacationists. For such long-term visitors, Montana is somewhat limited in resort-type facilities outside of the national parks. Not all people, or all families are interested in dude ranch vacations, nor are there great numbers who will spend a week or two out in the wilds.

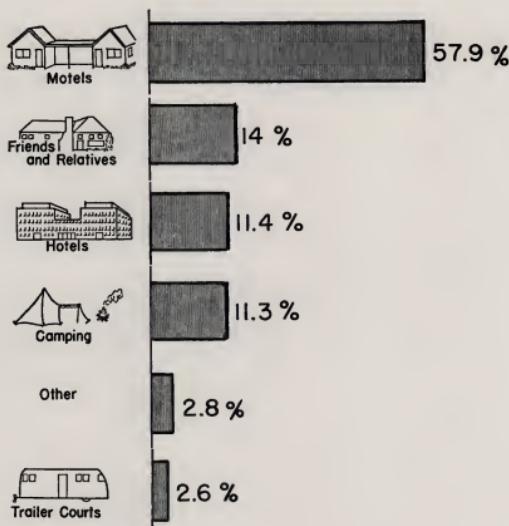
Since the end of the war, facilities for transient type tourists have been expanded greatly and many fine new accommodations are now available to Montana visitors. You will note later on in this report the comments on Treasure State accommodations are overwhelmingly favorable.

The number of miles driven by the average motorist in Montana was not computed for 1953. It undoubtedly is within range of the four previous years somewhere around 662 miles which is the four years' average. As one of the Montana historical markers states, "You have to push a lot of ground behind you to get anywhere in this state."



### Types of Lodging Used While in Montana

Not a great deal of change in the types of accommodations occurred in 1953. By far, the most popular accommodations were motels, followed by hospitable Montana friends and relatives. As noted earlier in this report, camping is on the upgrade and rose from 10% in 1952 to 11.3% in 1953.

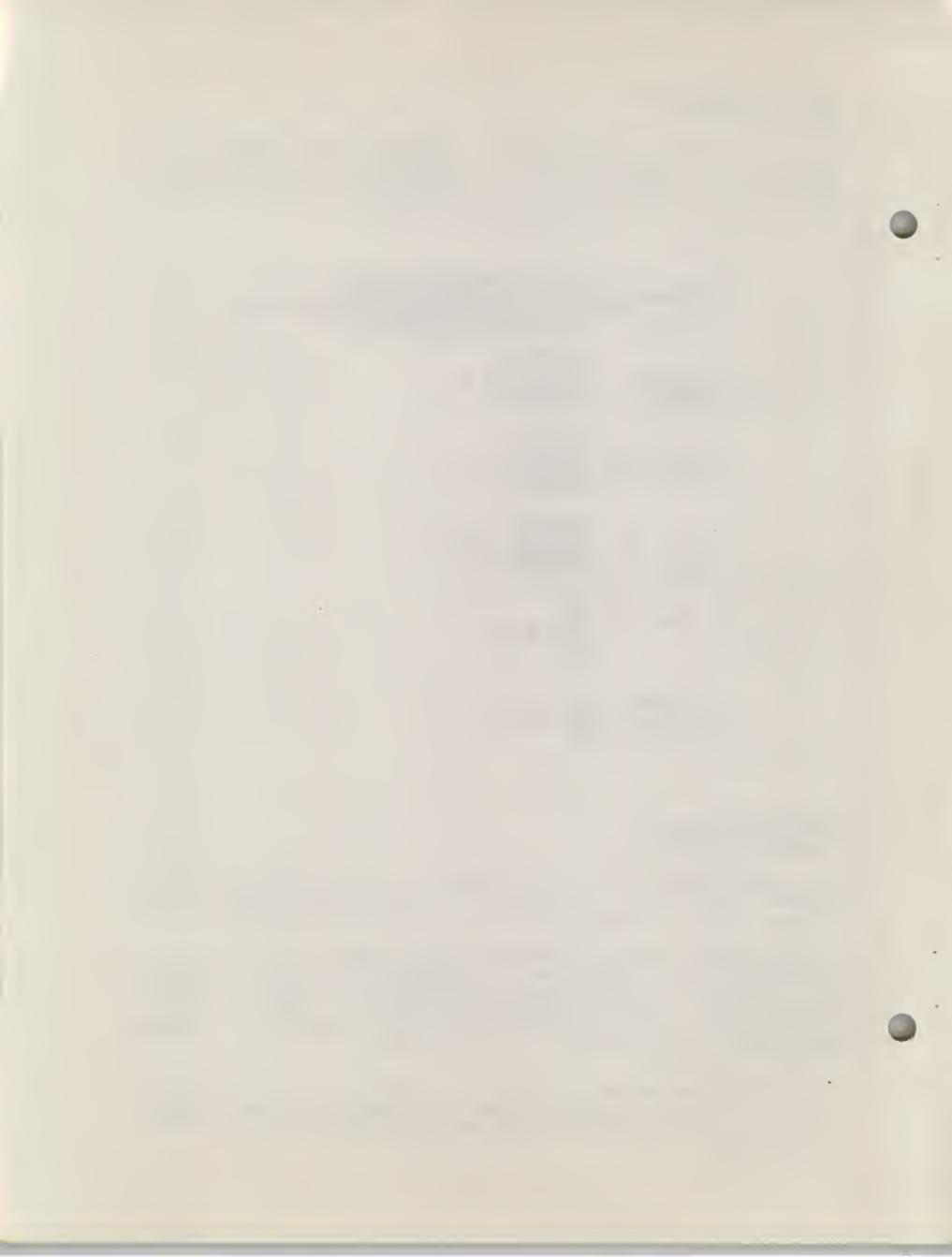


### Glacier Park is No. 1 Destination in Montana

On the next page are listed tourist destinations within Montana. Glacier National Park is without question the No. 1 tourist attraction in the state. Yellowstone National park was a comparable magnet for state visitors.

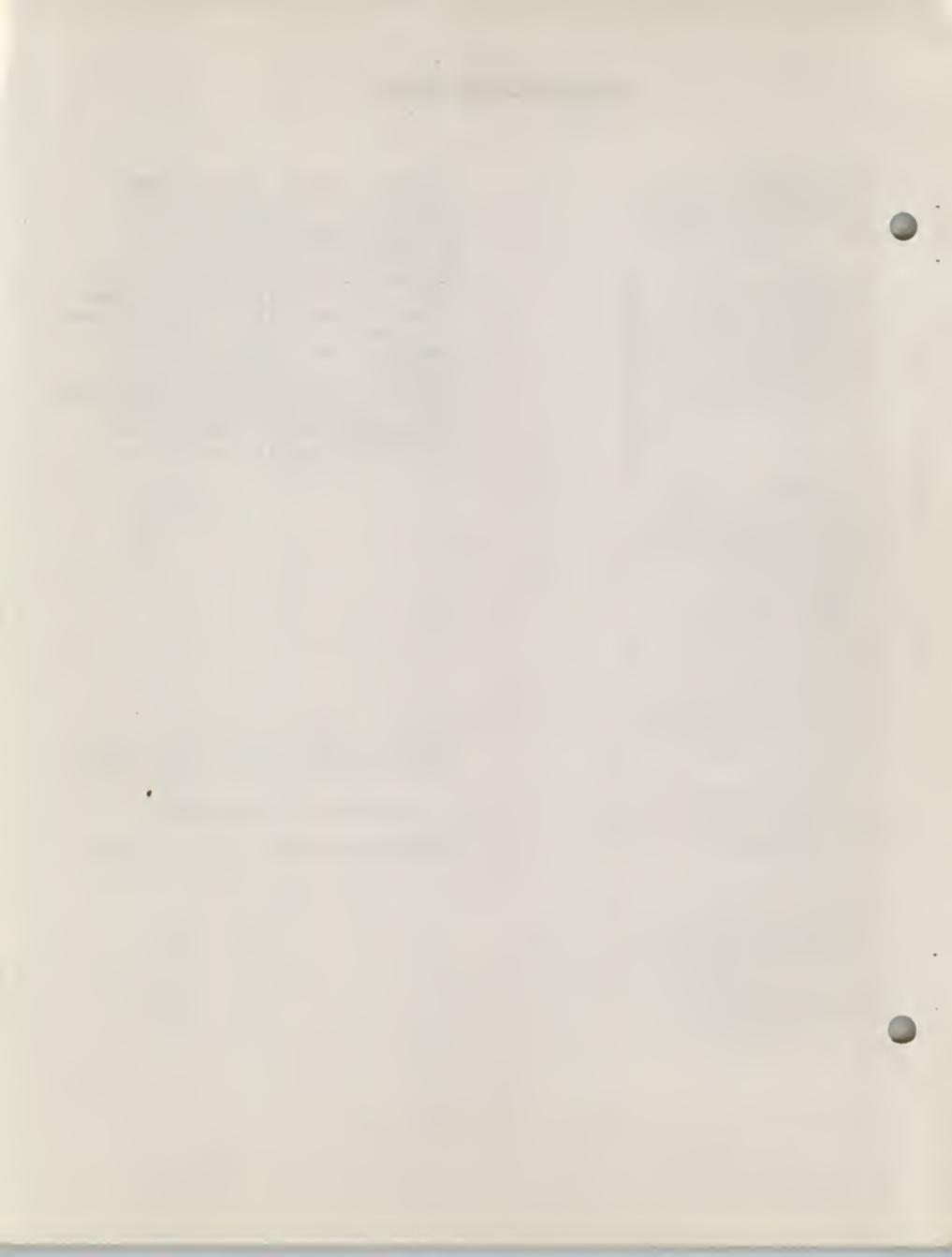
Montana's famous fishing rivers—the Big Hole, Madison, Yellowstone and Flathead—drew many to the state, as did Virginia City, Custer Battlefield and individual attractions in and near Montana cities. There is still a tendency for the visitor to highball through without stopping to see local attractions. Much of this is due to the failure of communities to adequately "sell" such attractions.

Following the destination page, are visitor comments about Montana. This is one of the most interesting sections of the questionnaire card provides the clue as to how the traveler feels about his stay in the Land of Shining Mountains.



DESTINATIONS WITHIN MONTANA

Big Hole River.....	3	Absarokee, Augusta, Bainville, Belt, Big Timber, Broadus, Brooks, Browning, Circle, Creston, Cut Bank, Darby, Drummond, Eureka, Fairview, Forsyth, Ft. Benton, Ft. Peck, Froid, Geraldine, Hardin, Harlowton, Hot Springs, Lodge Grass, Malta, Manhattan, Melville, Moore, Noxon, Nye, Opheim, Park City, Philipsburg, Pony, Power, Prior, Saco, Scobey, Seeley Lake, Sheep Creek, Shelby, Sheridan, Springdale, Stanford, St. Ignatius, St. Regis, Swan Lake, Sweetgrass, Terry, Three Forks, Townsend, Trout Creek, Utica, Whitehall, Wilsall, Winifred, Wisdom and Wolf Point.....	1
Billings.....	64		
Missoula.....	27		
Kalispell.....	23		
Butte.....	21		
Great Falls.....	21		
Helena.....	18		
Bozeman.....	15		
Virginia City.....	14		
Livingston.....	12		
Miles City.....	10		
Ennis.....	6		
Lewistown.....	6		
Havre.....	5		
Red Lodge.....	4		
Sidney.....	4		
Bigfork.....	3		
Conrad.....	3		
Custer.....	3		
Glasgow.....	3		
Hamilton.....	3		
Laurel.....	3		
Roundup.....	3		
Whitefish.....	3		
Anaconda.....	2		
Basin.....	2		
Boulder.....	2		
Chester.....	2		
Columbia Falls.....	2		
Deer Lodge.....	2		
Dillon.....	2		
Gallatin Gateway.....	2		
Glendive.....	2		
Joliet.....	2		
Libby.....	2		
Lothair.....	2		
Plentywood.....	2		
Polson.....	2		
Silver Gate.....	2		
West Yellowstone.....	2		
Montana In General-----	8		
Glacier National Park-----	257		
Specific Destinations in Montana-----	377		
TOTAL MONTANA DESTINATIONS-----	642		
Yellowstone National Park-----	259		



#### VISITOR COMMENTS ABOUT MONTANA

## Campgrounds

Please provide more roadside campsites, picnic tables; keep campgrounds already provided in better and cleaner condition. 98

## Montana Hospitality

Varied comments concerning hospitality of Montanans. . . . . 289

### General Reaction to the State

"Wonderful time", "Enjoyed ourselves very much", "Had a wonderful Time", "Enjoyed traveling through Montana very much". etc. 574

Comments on Scenery, such as "Beautiful", "Wonderful" and "Spectacular", etc., 165

#### Favorable Comments on Specific Attractions in Montana:

Custer National Battlefield.....	6
Cooke City-Red Lodge Highway.....	15
Browning Plains Indian Museum.....	2
State Museum - Russell Room.....	6
Lewis and Clark (Morrison) Cavern	12
Virginia City.....	16
Flathead Lake.....	5
Fort Peck dam and lake.....	4
Yellowstone National Park.....	4
Glacier National Park.....	63

TOTAL FAVORABLE COMMENTS ..... 872

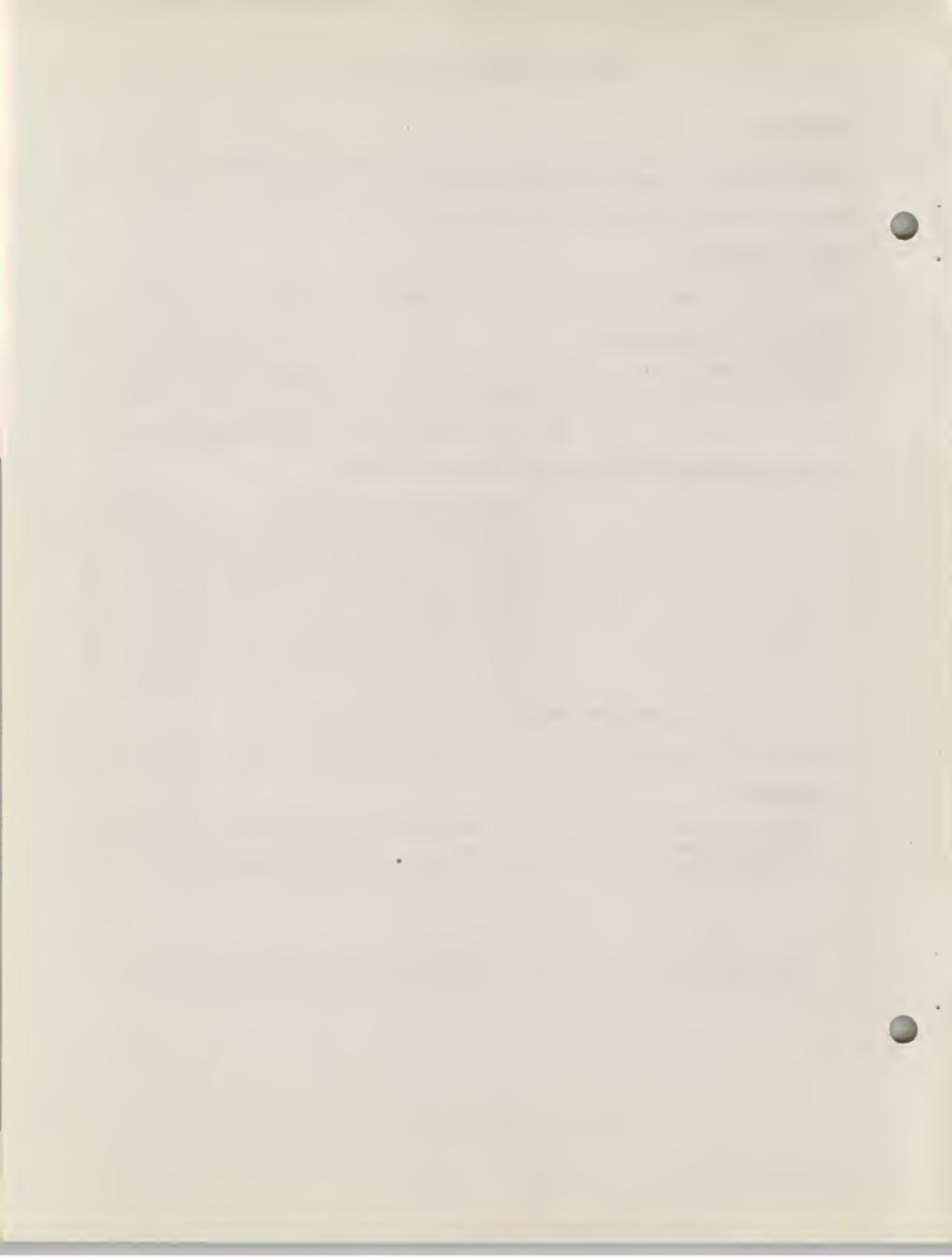
Unfavorable Comments Concerning State - "Disappointed", "Dry", "Dull", etc..... 7

## Accommodations

Motels were Good .....	119	Motels - Reasonably Priced.....	13
Motels were Bad .....	10	Motels - Too Expensive .....	26
(Motels were specified in 90% of comments under accommodations)			

## Food

Food was Good..... 29 Food - Reasonably Priced ..... 6  
Food was Bad ..... 1 Food - Too Expensive ..... 7



(Comments Continued)

Montana Highways

Good.....	375	Fair.....	42
Excellent .....	187	Poor .....	53
	562	Very Poor .....	21

Highway Markings Good .....	52	Enjoyed Historical Markers...	37
Highway Markings Inadequate...	46		

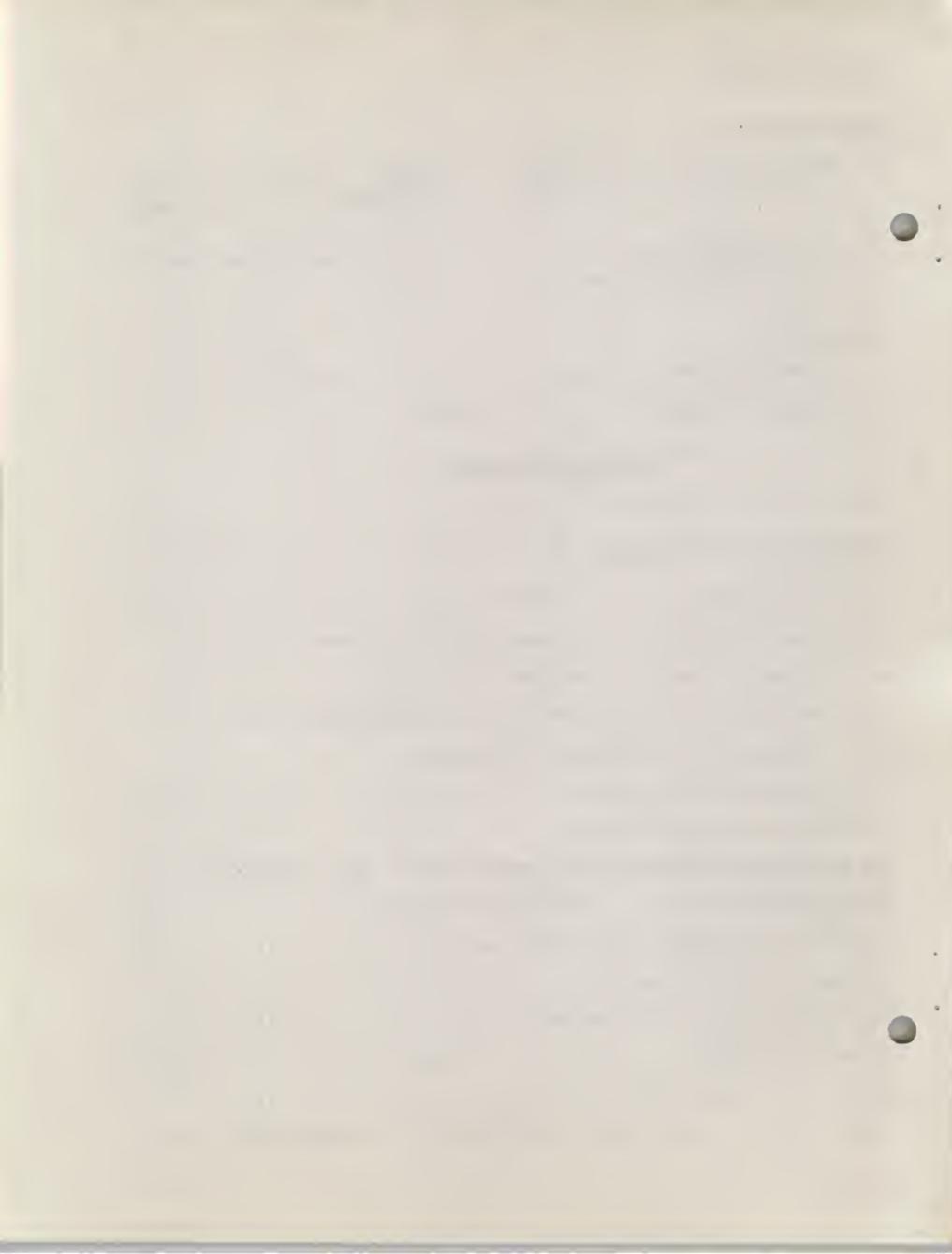
Ports of Entry

Enthusiastic about Port of Entry Stations..... 72

Objected to Stopping at Port of Entry Stations ..... 4

MISCELLANEOUS REMARKS

Gasoline Prices too High	✓	.....	19
Construction Workers Courteous .....		.....	6
Construction Workers Discourteous .....		.....	3
Highway from Yellowstone Park to Bozeman in extremely bad condition	✓	.....	13
Too many miles of construction workings going on at one time .....		.....	2
Made good use of the Montana highway map .....		.....	9
Should mark streams and rivers so travelers could learn names of same	✓	.....	7
More accommodations needed in Glacier National Park .....		.....	5
Roads into East Glacier very bad .....		.....	12
Need more Patrolmen on the Highways .....		.....	2
Not sufficient mud and rock guards on heavy trucks -- broke windshields .....		.....	5
Enjoyed the weather..... 12 Weather too hot .....		.....	3
Enjoyed the wheat fields, cattle, farms, etc. .....		.....	14
Recommend a State Motel Guide .....		.....	2
Road into Virginia City from East poor .....		.....	7
Highway U. S. 212 bad .....		.....	11
Enjoyed Great Falls and Billings Fairs .....		.....	6
Tourists making from the second to ninth return trip to Montana .....		.....	25



### How Can Our Tourist Business Be Expanded?

The State Advertising Advisory Committee, created in 1953 and composed of representatives from every section of the state and from all phases of the tourist business, along with the State Highway Commission, have indicated an interest in lengthening Montana's tourist season. As it now exists the bulk of Montana's visitors arrive between Memorial day and Labor day. Very few tourists are to be found here in May or during the autumn months of September and October.

Montana's short tourist season is mainly due to the misconception that Montana's weather, outside of the summer months, is not very conducive to travel. One of our major problems is overcoming this misunderstanding nationally. We are regarded as a frigid, winter state, and it is extremely difficult to get across the idea that fall is an ideal time in which to see the national parks and to vacation in the state.

### Do we Have any Off-Season Travel Now?

In order to determine, if we are getting much off-season travel, the Advertising Office in September, sent out a questionnaire to a cross-section of Montana motels, hotels, restaurants, etc. Here are the conclusions to be drawn from this questionnaire:

1. Montana is not getting very much after Labor Day tourist business.
2. Motels, some resorts and dude ranches have off-season rates as an inducement to travel early or late. These off-season rates in Montana vary from 10% to 30% reductions.
3. Montana's hotel and motel rates appear reasonable and food prices are in line.
4. There are no positive evidences that many people are taking more than one vacation a year in Montana.
5. Because of the State Highway Commission's aggressive winter maintenance policy, travel during the winter months has increased by leaps and bounds. More winter travel can be promoted from midwestern states through Montana to the Pacific Coast.

### The Future of Montana's Tourist Business

A lot of money has been invested by tourist suppliers in this state in the past seven or eight years. New motels, service stations, additions to hotels, resorts, restaurants and sporting goods shops have appeared on the scene because of the unprecedented number of tourists coming into the state.

As pointed out previously, 1953 is a levelling off year. Where do we go from here? Is this the end of the line, or is it a breather so that travel can go on to greater heights? No one really knows. The only certain thing is that Montana is in a very competitive field and will have to bear down harder if it is to keep what it already has and go onto greater tourist income.

